

## Lt. Colonel (Ret) John Sparks



On April 27, 2005 retired Air Force Lt. Colonel John H. Sparks passed away. The loss of Mr. Sparks is a sad loss to the veteran population in Utah.

Lt. Colonel Sparks was born in Montgomery, Alabama on January 25, 1941. Although he was only 64, Mr. Sparks accomplished more in his brief life than many people who live to be 100. Hard work and devotion to learning helped him earn a Bachelor of Science Degree in Mechanical Engineering from Tuskegee Institute, a Masters Degree in Mechanical Engineering from Oklahoma State University and a Masters of Science Degree in Religious Education from Loyola University.

In 1963 John Sparks joined the United States Air Force and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1984. While in the Air Force John was so extraordinary that his superiors tasked him with the vital mission of directing the development of the Peace Keeper Missile Propulsion and Ordnance Systems. Towards the end of his military career he was an ROTC instructor at Grambling University.

John loved both his country and community. He served as President of Black Catholics of Utah, Knights of Columbus and at the time of his death John was serving as the Chairman of the Utah Veterans Advisory Council and the Veterans Nursing Home Board.

In 2000 John retired from Hercules Aerospace but he used much of his newly acquired "free time" to fight for the cause of getting more benefits for Utah's Veterans. When it came to obtaining these benefits John wouldn't take "No" for an answer. He rolled up his sleeves and worked diligently on behalf of Veterans. Mr. Sparks was one of the driving forces behind getting a bill approved through the Utah State Legislature for the funding of a second Veterans Nursing Home in Ogden.

John Sparks is a bona fide hero whose dedication to veterans never wavered. Veterans throughout the state of Utah should rest easy knowing there are people of John Sparks' caliber looking out for their benefits. He was an original and I wish there were more people like him. He'll certainly be missed.

## Upcoming Events

- **Nov 9th, 2005** Veterans Entrepreneurial Workshop 8:30am - 1pm George Wahlen VAMC bldg 9 auditorium.
- **Nov 11th, 2004** Veterans' Day Program at the Veterans Memorial Cemetery. The event will begin at 2:00 p.m. Guest speaker Governor Huntsman.
- **Nov 11th, 2004** Utah National Guard Band Concert 7pm at the Huntsman Center.
- **Nov 15th, 2004** Veterans Guide to Obtaining Federal Employment Workshop 8:30am - 11am.

## Veterans Day 2005

Thanks to those who serve today and those who have served.



*Procession to Arlington for the Unknown Soldier of World War I. Among the pall bearers were WWI Medal of Honor recipients Samuel Woodfill and Ernest Janson. Also a poster of the Iwo Jima memorial.*

World War I - known at the time as "The Great War" - officially ended when the Treaty of Versailles was signed on June 28, 1919, in the Palace of Versailles outside the town of Versailles, France. However, fighting ceased seven months earlier when an armistice, or temporary cessation of hostilities, between the Allied nations and Germany went into effect on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. For that reason, November 11, 1918, is generally regarded as the end of "the war to end all wars," and is the anniversary of the Armistice signed in the Forest of Compiègne by the Allies and the Germans in 1918, ending World War I, after four years of conflict.

At 5 am on Monday, November 11, 1918, when the Germans signed the Armistice, an order was issued for all firing to cease; so the

hostilities of the First World War ended. This day began with the laying down of arms, blowing of whistles, impromptu parades, closing of places of business. All over the globe there were many demonstrations; no doubt the world has never before witnessed such rejoicing.

In November of 1919, President Woodrow Wilson issued his Armistice Day proclamation. The last paragraph set the tone for future observances:

To us in America, the reflections of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country's service and with gratitude for the victory, both because of the thing from which it has freed us and because of the opportunity it has given America to show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of the nation.

In 1927 Congress issued a resolution requesting President Calvin Coolidge to issue a proclamation calling upon officials to display the Flag of the United States on all government buildings on November 11 and inviting the people to observe the day in schools and churches. But it was not until 1938 that Congress passed a bill that each November 11 "shall be dedicated to the cause of world peace and ...hereafter celebrated and known as Armistice Day."

That same year President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a bill making the day a legal holiday in the District of Columbia. For sixteen years the United States formally observed Armistice Day, with impressive ceremonies at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where the

see **V-DAY** on pg 7



# The Utah Veterans Voice

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[www.ut.ngb-army\\_mil/veterans](http://www.ut.ngb-army_mil/veterans)

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## UTAH VETERANS VOICE NEWSPAPER AD RATES

The Veterans Voice is circulated to Utah's Veterans. 10,000 hard copies of the paper are made and the paper is also available online at [www.ut.ngb.army.mil/veterans](http://www.ut.ngb.army.mil/veterans).

Following are the ad rates for the paper:

Full Page: \$400.00  
1/2 Page: \$275.00  
1/4 Page: \$150.00  
1/8 Page: \$90.00

To place an ad contact either Todd Andrews or Terry Schow at (801) 326-2372, toll-free 1-800-894-9497, fax (801) 326-2369 or email [tandrews@utah.gov](mailto:tandrews@utah.gov).

# Hurricane Katrina Veterans Outreach

On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2005 the Utah State Division of Veterans Affairs helped establish an area at Camp Williams to assist veterans displaced by the hurricane. Support continued at Camp Williams until the relief effort was closed. Local support continues for those veterans placed in the Valor House and those veterans who elected to remain in the State of Utah. The evacuees sent to Utah included World War II thru Gulf War veterans.

Fifty-six (56) veterans were identified and provided services ranging from transportation to the VA Hospital/VA Regional Office/shopping at area malls/banks and credit unions. These veterans were assisted in getting their VA benefit checks, State assistance checks, and FEMA checks. Transportation assistance was also provided for those wanting to travel to met families and relatives in other states. The Utah Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and American Legion (AL) offices provided monetary support in amounts of \$1,000 - \$1,500 to many veterans or widowed spouses.

The American Legion Post #112 sponsored a barbecue for Katrina veterans. There were also treated to a tour to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints temple grounds; Fort Douglas museum and the downtown shopping mall.

Thanks to everyone who provided assistance in helping these veterans in difficult circumstances. A special thanks goes out to the Ft. Douglas museum; Ed Betenson; American Legion Post #112; University of Utah transportation services; Salt Lake VA Regional Office and the VA Medical Center. A very special thanks goes out to Nancy Imhoff-Smith and Fred Hamilton for their warm hugs and compassion! Contributions are still being accepted at the Utah State Division of Veterans Affairs office. Over 20 of the Katrina Veteran evacuees have chosen Utah to be their new home!

## Veterans Services

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) has more than 100 trained service officers to assist any veteran, or their dependents, obtain federal or state entitlements. In Utah the VFW Service Officer is Michael Jensen at (801) 326-2387 VFW service officers also assist veterans seeking discharge upgrades, record corrections, education benefits, disability compensation, pension eligibility and other veterans' needs. Field representatives regularly inspect VA healthcare facilities, regional offices and national cemeteries. In addition, civil service and employment specialists monitor laws concerning veterans' preference in federal employment. There is a 24-hour help line for veterans with questions or concerns about VA entitlements.

### VFW Celebrates 106 Years of Service to Others *Sept. 29, 2005* *From VFW Commander-In-Chief James R. Mueller*

In honor of VFW Day, Veterans of Foreign Wars members worldwide are celebrating our 106 years of service to our nation, community, veterans and the military. As such it is appropriate to mark this anniversary in the same spirit of service that is the VFW trademark. Just like our founding fathers did back in 1899, VFW members are continuing in the tradition of helping others by serving as distribution centers and shelters for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita evacuees, supporting our military servicemembers and honoring our nation's veterans. Thank you VFW, for what you all are doing to make America better.

### VFW Honors USS Cole/Navy Sailors; Oct. 13 Navy Birthday

Nearly a year before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on America, terrorists struck one of the U.S. Navy's most powerful surface combatants: the guided-missile destroyer USS Cole. Although her sailors fought gallantly to save and defend her, the October 12, 2000, attack on the Cole left 17 shipmates dead. Just like the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor nearly 64 years before, the attack on the Cole only strengthened the resolve and spirit of her crew. The Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliaries will never forget the sacrifices of USS Cole sailors and will continue to perpetuate the memories of those who died that day by placing floral memorials on each of the sailor's gravesite on the anniversary of the terrorist attack. As we mark the fifth anniversary of the Cole bombing, the 2.4 million members of the VFW and its Auxiliaries also would like to praise and thank all the men and women in the U.S. Navy for becoming part of the Navy's 230-year history.



# Thanks to Outstanding Volunteer Driver Clayton Morgan



*Clayton Morgan, DAV volunteer van driver, with one of the DAV vans.*

Imagine driving 65 round trips from Los Angeles, California to New York City. That totals approximately 316,746 miles and that equal the distance Clayton Morgan, Disabled American Veterans (DAV) volunteer van driver from Ely, Nevada has driven transporting 1,760 veterans from Nevada to the George E. Whalen VA Medical Center in Salt Lake City.

Starting in 1998, Clayton has make 567 round trips from Ely, Nevada to the medical center and has been credited with a total of 8,660 volunteer hours. “This man is truly remarkable, he is up at 3 AM and ready to pick up his veterans, and it doesn’t matter what the weather is. If he is scheduled to be here he will be here.” says Heidi Hopper, DAV Hospital Service Coordinator at the Medical Center.

During the winter months, it is not unusual for Clayton to get through even when professional drivers back away. Driving lonely two-lane roads can require nerves of steel but white knuckle driving is old hat to Clayton.

“I will never forget the day Clayton hit a deer on the highway and drove the rest of the way into the medical center with the hood wired down, both headlights broken, leaking radiator and half the front bumper missing. He actually had to look out the drivers window to see where he was going.” said John Maher, Department Adjutant of the DAV. “He drove all the way about 30 miles an hour but he wanted to get his veterans to the medical center.”

There are approximately 4,000 volunteer DAV drivers in the nation, and Clayton ranks in the top five in mileage. Even more impressive is the fact the those ahead of him have been driving for many years and Clayton has accomplished his 316,746 miles in just over 7 years. He averages about 4,300 miles per month making about 10 monthly trips. His goal is to be number one in the country in mileage.

You might think with all the volunteer hours Clayton puts in driving the van, he would not have much time for other things. Think again!!! Clayton is known in Ely, Nevada as the man who likes to build house decks, and he does it at no cost to the owner. There is only one rule Clayton has: you must buy the best materials on the market and be patient, because, just like his driving, when Clayton builds a deck it is a professional job.

At his present pace, Heidi Hopper, Utah DAV Hospital Service Coordinator (HSC) projects Clayton to become number one in the country in about 4 more years, and when it happens Department Adjutant John Maher has promised Clayton a huge honorary banquet in his honor at department headquarters.

The Utah DAV Transportation Program has enjoyed amazing growth since its inception n 1997. At that time there were only the two vans, both from Idaho, and shortly after, Utah DAV purchased another two vans for placement in Odgen and Vernal, Utah. Compare that start to the present program that covers four states; four vans in Utah, two vans in Wyoming, two vans in Nevada, and two vans in Idaho.

The program has totaled over a million and one/half miles, and transported over 20,000 veterans to the George E. Whalen Medical Center. “Frankly, I am very impressed that Heidi can coordinate 10 vans and over 80 volunteer drivers,” says John Maher, the first DAV HSC at the medical Center. “When I left there were only 6 vans and maybe 50 volunteer drivers.”

HSC’s are not only responsible for coordinating vans and drivers, but must compile both a monthly and yearly report reflecting all hours, miles, and trips for all the drivers. “Heidi still used the program I designed back in 1997 for record keeping, so I must have done a pretty good job on it,” offered Maher.

“Our records keeping is designed to reflect exact numbers not only for each driver, but for each route and state as well,” says Heidi. “That way we can make better projections for van replacement and growth of routes.” The Utah DAV has invested over \$200,000 dollars in the van program since 1997. Although four states are involved in the program, Utah DAV funds the entire cost of the office, and also must purchase its own replacement vans.

“Its gets expensive, but when you work here and see how many veterans we get to the Medical Center that would have no other way to get to their appointments, it certainly is worth it,” said Heidi. Even with all these achievements, both Heidi and John realize that the real success of the program is due to the volunteer drivers. Without them the program could not exist. Next time you see a DAV Van driving down the street, take the time to salute the driver, they deserve it!!!!

***By John Maher  
Disabled American Veterans, Department of Utah Adjutant***

## 2005 VAN SCHEDULE FOR:

**LOGAN, VERNAL UTAH,  
ELY NEVADA,  
ROCK SPRINGS WYOMING**

## CALL:

**1(800)613-4012 EXT. 2003**

**FOR APPOINTMENTS**

# Disabled American Veterans

The Utah Disabled American Veterans is encouraging all Chapter to participate in the National Commander’s Award for the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the year. The nominee for the national award need not be a member of the DAV but must be eligible for membership. Rules and application form can be obtained from Department Headquarters, 273 East 800 South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84111.

## DAV TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

There now is DAV Van Transportation service available from St.George, Utah to the Salt Lake City VA Health care System Hospital. The service is new and scheduling is being done as per needed. We need volunteer drivers for the St. George area. For transportation arrangements or to volunteer to drive, call Heidi Hopper at the VA at:  
**1-801-582-1565, Ext. 2003.**

## Veterans Outreach Presentations

Veteran Benefit Presentations have been and are currently being given to National Guard and Reserve units throughout the State. The purpose of these presentations is to help veterans take advantage of what they have earned. VA hospital benefits; Service-Connected Disability application procedures; Vocational Rehabilitation and Education programs; Training; Montgomery GI Bill; Veterans Outreach Employment and other benefits are explained. Referrals are given to the VA Medical Center, Department of Work Force Services and National Service Organizations (i.e. VFW, DAV, AL)

Over 50 National Guard and Navy/Marine/Air Force/ Air National Guard and Army Reserve units have received the presentations representing over 2600 personnel. Presentations will continue over the next few months.

Attempts are made to reach the returning Gulf theater of operations personnel as soon as possible, preferably at their first drill following active duty. This helps those veterans take advantage of benefits with time constraints.

Contact the Utah State Division of Veterans Affairs at 801-326-2372 for upcoming unit presentations.

# Veterans of Utah Announcing A Special Offer

## You're Invited!

The military Veterans of Utah and their families have very special needs and situations as a result of having given service to our country in addition to the everyday situations created by life's events.

In recognition of this and as a special request, we are pleased to offer a *Quality PROGRAM* just for you and your families at a low monthly rate.

For specific information regarding our services, please visit this website; [www.prepaidlegal.com/hub/johnvaldez](http://www.prepaidlegal.com/hub/johnvaldez)

Questions, concerns, and Activation of membership can be made by calling our representative:

**John R. Valdez**  
**Independent Associate**  
**(CW2, USAR Retired)**  
**801-726-8657**  
**[oldshaman@sbcglobal.net](mailto:oldshaman@sbcglobal.net)**

## We look forward to visiting with you!

## Utah Division of Veterans Affairs Website

For information about federal and state Veterans benefits please visit [www.ut.ngb.army.mil/veterans](http://www.ut.ngb.army.mil/veterans).

This is the official website of the Utah Division of Veterans Affairs. It is full of wide-ranging valuable information and is updated frequently so check back periodically.

## Jennifer Love Hewitt Veterans Day Spokesperson

As National Honorary Spokesperson for Veterans Day, Jennifer Love Hewitt has visited VA medical centers and shared stories of veterans with school-age children nationwide. She also filmed a public service announcement reminding people that "Veterans Day is not a day off; it's our heroes' day." Additionally, Hewitt is featured in a short video that gives students ideas on how to honor veterans year-round, including volunteer opportunities and visits to classrooms by veterans.

"I want to show the kids of America that veterans are not just grandparents, uncles and aunts, they're our classmates, neighbors and friends," Hewitt said. "Veterans deserve our utmost respect and admiration for the sacrifices they have made for each and every one of us. I want to bring their stories to the attention of those who need to understand that freedom isn't free."

Hewitt is best known to television audiences as "Sarah Reeves" in the hit drama series "Party of Five." She also starred in the feature film "Tuxedo."



## Pre-Paid Legal Services<sup>®</sup>, Inc. *"Your Life Events Legal Plan."*

**You may say, "I don't have any legal situations, I don't need an attorney." However, if you answer "yes" to any of the following questions, you do.**

- Have you or someone you know experienced Identity Theft?
- Have you ever worried about being sued for doing your job?
- Have you been denied benefits or services that were promised to you?
- Do you need to have your will prepared or updated?
- Have you ever received an inaccurate credit rating?
- Have you ever had problems with an insurance claim?
- Have you ever paid a bill you knew was unfair?
- Do you have teenage drivers or drive like a teenager yourself?
- Have you ever had a car repair bill that was not the amount you authorized?
- Has a company ever refused to honor the warranty on a product you purchased?
- Have you ever had to collect child support?
- Have you ever been treated unfairly or been taken advantage of?

\* Consult state/province-specific brochures and plan contracts for actual terms, coverage, amounts, conditions and exclusions.

*"With major surgery coming up . . . I realized I was without a will. On Monday...I called your firm in a panic. On Wednesday the will was in my mailbox ready for my signature. Now that's speed and efficiency! They truly cared, and how they handled the situation showed the kind of professionalism we seldom see anymore. Thanks to them I can sleep a little better at night."*

*– Member, Oklahoma*

*"Thank you for the time you spent with us last month in preparing us for our first IRS audit. You gave us valuable information and gave us the confidence we needed. At our meeting the auditor explained that she was not able to come up with any documentation against us. In fact, they owed us a \$501 refund!"*

*– Member, South Carolina*

*"People whose identities have been stolen can spend months or years — and thousands of dollars — cleaning up the mess the thieves have made to their good name and credit record."*

*Federal Trade Commission: When Bad Things Happen  
to Your Good Name, September 2002*



# Utah Division of Veteran Affairs to Hold Silent Auction

**Silent Auction-** One November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in conjunction with the Veteran’s Day Concert at the University of Utah, the Utah Division of Veteran Affairs will be hosting a Silent Art Auction to raise funds for Veteran’s Programs. The auction will take place at the Huntsman center at the University of Utah from 6pm until the end of the concert, approximately 9pm.

Items to be auctioned range from various types of art work, paintings, and photography, autographed books, flags from the US capitol, a quilt, CD’s, gift certificates for art classes, memberships to the Utah Museum of Fine Art and other items.

Individuals will be able to make bids on Veteran’s day, however, the auction will be open for bidding until November 15<sup>th</sup>. The Utah Division of Veteran Affairs has produced a pamphlet listing all items available for action. If interested in viewing this pamphlet, to place a bid or for any additional information call (801) 326-2372 or 1-800-894-9497.

## Utah Division of Veterans Affairs Seeks Volunteers

The Utah Division of Veterans Affairs is seeking volunteers to assist with various Veteran related projects. Individuals are needed to provide assistance with Military Funeral Honors for Veterans that have passed away, the Veterans Nursing Home, Veterans Cemetery, annual Veterans Golf Tournament fundraiser, Veterans Outreach, interviews for the Veterans History Project, Homeless Veterans Stand Down and Veterans Information and Benefit Fairs.

If you want to volunteer or if you have any questions about volunteering please call Todd Andrews at either (801) 326-2372 or 1-800-894-9497. You can also email him at [tandrews@utah.gov](mailto:tandrews@utah.gov). Any assistance you can provide is greatly appreciated.

## Homeless Veterans Outreach Program

Permanent Outreach Programs are setup at the Road Home and St. Vincent DePaul. The purpose of the Homeless Veterans Outreach Program is to inform these veterans of resources that are available to them from the Utah Department of Workforce Services, the Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office and the VA Medical Center.

Tables are setup at the above mentioned permanent sites and the Homeless Veterans receive an assessment to determine what their needs may be. After their needs are determined they Vets are assisted in filling out the appropriate forms to receive help.

The goal of this program is to make our services available to the Homeless Veterans and to let them know they are not forgotten. These men and women gave a lot for our country when we needed them and now it is our turn to give back.

# SURVIVOR BENEFIT PLAN OPEN SEASON

Retirees have a chance to enroll in the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) or increase their rate of participation during the SBP Open Enrollment Period (October 1, 2005 – September 30, 2006)

If you did not elect SBP or covered less than the full retired pay as your base amount, you might want to consider your decision because of the law change and open enrollment period.

*Who Can Enroll?* A retiree not yet age 60 who has an eligible beneficiary that could have enrolled in SBP previously, but didn’t, or who did enroll but was covered less than full retired pay as the base amount.

*What election can you make?* During this open enrollment, a retiree can: enroll any category for the first time (coverage categories are: spouse, former spouse, spouse and child, former spouse and child, child only, and natural person with an insurable interest); increase your existing coverage ( such as increasing the base amount of retired pay covered or adding child coverage to spouse or former spouse coverage); and if a gray area retiree, can make any of these elections, and may change your Reserve Component SBP.

*What is the Cost?* The retiree must pay monthly premiums starting on the date of enrollment and a **one-time, buy-in enrollment premium**. Under the law, the following figures create a cost factor used to calculate a retiree’s buy-in enrollment premium: back premiums (the total SBP premiums the retiree would have paid if enrolled at the first opportunity); plus interest; plus an amount calculated to protect the actuarial soundness of the DoD Retirement Fund. To calculate your cost, go to <http://www.armyg1.army.mil/retire>. The form for application/change is DD Form 2656-9 and can be obtained by going to [www.hrc.army.mil](http://www.hrc.army.mil) and following the links to packages and forms.

Additional information may be obtained by calling Human Resources Command St. Louis at 1-800-318-5298. Reserve-specific open enrollment information is also available at <https://www.hrc.army.mil/site/reserve/soldiersservices/retirement/index.htm>

## What Every Wife Should Know

There are many pamphlets, bulletins, and other useful tools provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for former POWs on benefits. The toll free number to call for information and assistance is 1-800-827-1000. If you call to schedule an appointment, it is important to keep this appointment as scheduled or call to cancel if unable to make the appointment. All claims for VA benefits must be submitted to a VA Regional Office for processing.

There is a special 110-page booklet that has been prepared and distributed by a veterans group, with headquarters in Arlington, Texas. It is entitled:  
*“What Every Wife Should Know Before She is Your Widow”*

This booklet, know as “Packet Number 5,” is available for \$11.00, plus shipping and handling. It has been updated to include the most recent changes in the law and benefits. This booklet can be ordered at the following address:

**American Ex-Prisoners of War National Headquarters**  
**3201 East Pioneer Parkway, Suite # 40**  
**Arlington, Texas 76010-5396**  
**(telephone # (817) 649-2979)**

At their annual meeting in Denver in September, I was able to obtain a copy of this booklet. It contains an amazing amount of information and many VA and other government forms, some for civil use with detailed information on how to properly use them. Packet Number 5 is a highly recommended item for every Ex-POW to obtain and as a way to complete his legacy to his family - it may be your last chance to “get it done right.”

Also available on the VA website ([www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)) is the Former Prisoner of War pamphlet, “Keeping the Promise,” dated November 2004. This pamphlet provides valuable information on health care, disability compensation, DIC, and other useful tools such as toll free numbers for VA health care and benefits. In addition, there are POW Fact Sheets available, dated October 2004. All of these publications are located at the VA’s Former Prisoner of War website by going to the main VA website ([www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)), then clicking on “Compensation & Pension Benefits” link, “Special Programs,” then the “Former POWs” link under Topics of Enduring Interest. This website is designed to assist Former POWs, their families, and survivors in obtaining needed VA benefits and health care services. For those without computer Internet access to this information, the VA Salt Lake City Health Care Library has computer and Internet access for veterans’ use, or you may contact the VA Regional Office in your area for information on VA benefits and health care services and how to obtain copies of these documents.

Again, for more information on VA benefits, please contact the local VA Regional Office, 550 Foothill Drive, PO Box 581900, Salt Lake City, Utah 84158-1900 or call the toll free number at 1-800-827-1000

by Gale Patterson, Ex-POW, WW II, Germany

## AMERICAN LEGION STEPPED UP DURING KATRINA AND RITA

We have stepped up during Katrina and Rita to provide immediate assistance for food, shelter , and clothing by taking grants direct ( 1-800-433-3318 or by email.). Our call center was operating seven days a week to help veterans in need. We have received over 1,000 calls and 800 emails for assistance in a three week period.

We processed over 950 grants for a total of \$1.1M during September. We normally approve \$350,000 for a year. Checks or credit cards credit received in three to five working days.

Our fund now has around \$700,000 remaining. It will last until late October without major replacement. We are receiving checks and electronic transfers on a daily basis from our Departments, Districts, Post, and individuals. A fundraising mailing to Departments, Post, and Districts went out September 30th.

We also plan on mailing a direct mail fundraiser to 270,000 known donors and prospects by the end of Oct.

Our Posts have stepped up to assist in their communities. We will hear from the Department Commanders in the effected States.

We need to do the “Adopt The Post” to help rebuild those Posts impacted by the hurricanes.

Our true story of “Mutual Helpfulness” is at work in the time of need.

Post 71 Holladay 3419 South West Temple Salt Lake City, Utah has collected over 330,000 pounds of clothing, this will fill 6 Semi's. Allied Vans Lines is shipping these loads to HoustonTexas, free of charge. Past National Commander John A. Brieden is Coordinating the distribution of these to the Areas that need the help. Post 71 is still collecting the much needed clothes.

The American Legion is and always will be there for the Veterans of this Great Country.

I remain For God and Country  
Thad S Jensen  
Department Commander Utah American Legion

# Legislative Subcommittee of the Governors Veterans Affairs Advisory Council Update

The Legislative subcommittee of the Governors Veterans Affairs Advisory Council has assembled several topics on which they are being asked to consider asking a legislator to sponsor new laws aiding veterans of Utah. Those discussions will take place during November.

Among the topics are:

- Changing the law that asks disabled veterans to re-file at the county clerk's office every year for their disabled veteran property tax exemption.

-Doing for the disabled veteran's STATE INCOME TAX what we were able to do for their property tax exemption.

-Asking that the applications for driver's licenses and license plates include an block indicating if the applicant is a veteran of military service.

-Asking that 50 cents be added to the registration fees for every passenger and small truck registration to help fund veterans' activities.

The Governors Veterans Affairs Advisory Council is tasked with discussing the various issues brought forth that affect the lives of Utah's veterans, and making recommendations to the Governor and the State Legislature.

## Disability Compensation - 2005 Rates

10 percent . . . \$108	60 percent . . . \$839
20 percent . . . \$210	70 percent . . . \$1,056
30 percent . . . \$324	80 percent . . . \$1,227
40 percent . . . \$466	90 percent . . . \$1,380
50 percent . . . \$663	100 percent . . . \$2,299

## Additional Payments for Dependents

Veterans whose service-connected disabilities are rated at 30 percent or more are entitled to additional allowances for dependents. Depending upon the disability rating of the veteran, monthly allowances for a spouse range from \$39 to \$94 and for a dependent child, \$26 to \$88. Additional amounts are provided for each additional child and there is a higher scale for children in school after age 18.

## Other Major Factors Affecting Payment Levels

Adjustments to rates are based on a number of factors in addition to dependents. Among factors that can have a significant effect on amounts are:

- Veterans with severe service-connected disabilities may receive compensation at a basic rate as high as \$6,576 per month. Various special monthly compensation rates apply when a veteran experiences loss or loss of use of one or more limbs; loses one or more of the senses of sight, hearing or speech; or experiences loss of a reproductive organ or its use, or loss of breast tissue by a female veteran.
- Allowances may be made for veterans requiring aides, such as bedridden individuals who need assistance with eating, bathing or certain other activities of daily living. This adjustment is referred to as “aid and attendance.”
- Veterans whose service-connected disability leaves them unable to maintain gainful employment may meet criteria for allowances at the 100 percent compensation rate under a benefit called “individual unemployability.” A veteran with a single service-connected disability may be eligible if the veteran’s disability is rated at 60 percent or more. A veteran with multiple disabilities may be eligible if the veteran has a combined rating of 70 percent or more and at least one of the disabilities is individually rated 40 percent or higher.

## Facts about VA Disability Compensation

- Disability compensation for veterans is not subject to federal or state income tax. About 80 percent of veterans receive their VA benefits by direct deposit, which VA recommends for security reasons.
- Veterans are rated at increments of 10 percent reflecting degree of disability. As federal regulations summarize the underlying principle, “The percentage ratings represent as far as can practicably be determined the average impairment in earning capacity resulting from such diseases and injuries and their residual conditions.”
- The largest category of veterans on the compensation scale is at 10 percent disability (\$108 per month), with 783,000 veterans at this rate at the beginning of fiscal year 2005 among the total 2.6 million veterans receiving disability compensation.
- The criteria for rating the severity of various disabilities are available online at [http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx\\_04/38cfr4\\_04.html](http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_04/38cfr4_04.html). As medical knowledge, laws and procedures change, VA regularly publishes proposed changes to these criteria in the *Federal Register* for public comment before a final regulation is adopted.

see **Compensation** on pg 11

**DISABLED AMERICAN  
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## V-DAY

•continued from pg 1

Chief Executive or his representative placed a wreath. In many other communities, the American Legion was in charge of the observance, which included parades and religious services. At 11 A.M. all traffic stopped, in tribute to the dead, then volleys were fired and taps sounded.

After World War II, there were many new veterans who had little or no association with World War I. The word, “armistice,” means simply a truce; therefore as years passed, the significance of the name of this holiday changed. Leaders of Veterans’ groups decided to try to correct this and make November 11 the time to honor all who had fought in various American wars, not just in World War I.

In Emporia, Kansas on November 11, 1953, instead of an Armistice Day program, there was a Veterans’ Day observance. Ed Rees, of Emporia, was so impressed that he introduced a bill into the House to change the name to Veterans’ Day. After this passed, Mr. Rees wrote to all state governors and asked for their approval and cooperation in observing the changed holiday. The 83rd Congress amended the Act of 1938 by striking out the word “Armistice” and inserting in its place the word “Veterans.” This Act of Congress changed the name to Veterans’ Day on May 24, 1954. In October of that year, President Eisenhower issued the first “Veterans Day Proclamation” and called on all citizens to observe the day by remembering the sacrifices of all those who fought so gallantly, and through rededication to the task of promoting an enduring peace. The President referred to the change of name to Veterans’ Day in honor of the servicemen of all America’s wars.

Veterans Day is observed on November 11th, regardless of what day of the week it falls. The observance of Veterans Day on November 11th not only preserves the historical significance of the date, but helps focus attention on the important purpose of Veterans Day: A celebration to honor America’s veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good.

## Utah Department of the Military Order of the Purple Heart

The members of the Utah Department of the Military Order of the Purple Heart are taking on another project to honor veterans in Utah. They will engrave the names of all the owners of the Purple Heart Medal on granite tablets to be placed next to their monument currently on display at Hill Air Force Base’s Aerospace Museum.

That monument was placed and dedicated in August 2004, near the small WWII chapel the museum at Exit 338 from Interstate Highway 15.

At present, Purple Heart project officer Thom Rodgers has collected and verified the names of nearly five hundred Utah veterans who were presented the Purple Heart Medal for wounds received during combat action. “Although somewhat expensive”, said Rodgers, “we feel it only fitting that we make this effort to memorialize those patriots whose service to their country included shedding their own blood for {the nation].”

The costs to engrave the names and set the two foot by four foot by eight inch tables will be around \$35,000, and is the subject of an additional project to collect that amount.

Those who have a member of their family who has a Purple Heart whose name needs to be on these tablets, or those who would like to contribute to the project, can mail their loved one’s information and/or their contribution to Frank Maughan, State MOPH Commander, at 731 W. 3750 North, Ogden, Utah 84414. Names must be accompanied by discharge papers or something from the US Department of Veterans Affairs or Defense Department verifying the award of the Purple Heart Medal.

# VA Disability Claims Processing

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) fulfills the government’s obligation to help those who leave the military injured or ill. In service to their country, military members give up the right to decline dangerous assignments. Their occupations lack conventional workers compensation coverage.

Administered through a network of 57 VA regional offices, disability compensation benefits cover chronic illnesses or injuries incurred during or worsened by military service. It is one of the VA’s most extensive benefits and among the most complex, posing a challenge to timely service.

Current payment rates and background on the basis for determining the severity of a disability are available at <http://www.va.gov/OPA/fact/05comprates.html>.

In fiscal year 2004, more than 703,000 veterans received decisions on their disability claims, and an additional 752,800 beneficiaries received decisions on claims not requiring a rating decision. VA added approximately 62,000 beneficiaries to its compensation and pension rolls, bringing the total number of beneficiaries of VA compensation and pension to nearly 3.5 million. Compensation and pension payments last year exceeded \$30 billion.

VA has made a commitment to keeping its rating claims inventory to 250,000 claims with an average processing time of 145 days. As recently as 2002, VA had more than 432,000 disability claims pending and a processing time in excess of 233 days. A September 2003 decision by the Federal Circuit Court significantly affected both workload and the timeliness of VA decisions in 2004. The decision held that denial of a claim is premature before the expiration of the one-year period established by the Veterans Claims Assistance Act of 2000. As a result, decisions on more than 62,000 claims were deferred, many for as much as 90 days or longer. A provision of the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 subsequently allowed VA to issue decisions on all of those cases deferred. VA’s disability claims inventory is currently approximately 336,000, and the timeliness of completed claims is once again declining with average processing speed at 171 days. The inventory is also affected by an increasing volume of claims from veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

## Claims Processing Improvement Task Force Spur Reforms

In response to a growing backlog of disability claims, coupled with an increasing number of days required to render a decision, VA commissioned a task force to study the processing methods and other performance drivers within the Veterans Benefits Administration and to make recommendations for corrective action. The Claims Processing Improvement Task Force made a number of recommendations early in fiscal year 2002. Key was the recommendation to shift the work processing method from the case management concept to that of the claims process improvement (CPI) model. The CPI model changed the manner in which claims are processed.

The CPI model differs from the case management model in a number of ways. For one thing, the CPI model allows for specialization of processing through the use of six specialized teams. Four of these teams address specific, critical cycles in claims processing: triage, pre-determination, rating, and post-determination. Two additional teams address important areas related to the process itself: Public Contact and Appeals. By shifting from an individual focus to a process focus, a number of improvements were gained. First, it became easier to spot process or flow disruptions since the work was organized around process flow and not individual assignments. Second, training and development could be very specific and focused. Third, the tools to monitor inventory were more effective in a process environment versus a case managed environment.

The Claims Processing Improvement Task Force also made a significant number of additional recommendations, the majority of which have been implemented. Additional information is available at <http://www.va.gov/opa/fact/claims/f>. Taken together, these recommendations created an integrated performance management system that not only complements the CPI model but has greatly enhanced the outcome.

## Accountability, Performance Management Key to Reforms

The concept of accountability was a hallmark of the Task Force report. The specific methods used to convert the accountability concept to reality were in four linked areas.

- First, performance became a factor in resource allocation. Prior to CPI, resource allocation was based upon expected workload as well as other factors generally related to the existing inventory. The new Resource Allocation Model provides more resources to those offices that demonstrate sustained high performance and increased productivity. This would ultimately be a large driver for those offices achieving very high performance.
- Second, the prior method of annual office evaluations was abandoned in favor of very detailed monthly targets for VA regional offices. These targets covered a vast array of performance measures including output, inventory, quality, older cases, and two measures for timeliness (a leading indicator and a lagging indicator). Offices were tracked each month with respect to progress toward meeting these targets. Focus on these targets became a significant driver in improving performance.
- Third, these targets were integrated into the performance plans of each VA Regional Office director. This linkage of resources and clear expectations with a rapid feedback cycle for results had a dramatic affect on performance, particularly rating output.
- Fourth, VA developed a sophisticated reward and recognition system with three levels of recognition. High performing offices could receive significant award money for performing at levels well above the national averages. A study by a VA team reviewing cycle time in VA has looked at the impact of these performance drivers in VA and concluded that they are making a significant difference.

There were two other drivers of performance that worked in concert with the integrated performance management system. These also had their genesis in the recommendations from the Task Force. The first involved dynamic brokering of claim work from offices unable to keep pace to offices with excess capacity or to teams specifically developed to work bordered cases. VA developed both a network of resource centers, teams within certain offices whose mission was to work brokered cases, and a Tiger Team dedicated to processing cases involving older veterans whose claims had been pending more than one year.

VA developed a number of automated tools specifically aimed at improving process cycle times. These include the Inventory Management system, the Modern Award Processing-Development tool, and a number of specific reports generated weekly and monthly that allow VA Central Office and field managers to monitor progress toward goals as well as spot cycle time delays in time to take corrective actions.

## Utah Division of Veterans’ Affairs 2005 Veterans Day Program

We would like to invite you to attend our 2005 Veterans Day Program. The program will be held on November 11, 2005 at the Veterans’ Memorial Cemetery. It will begin at 2:00 pm.

The guest speaker will be Governor Jon M. Huntsman Jr. There will also be a Salute to World War II Veterans. All World War II Veterans in attendance will be honored.

The address to the Cemetery is 17111 South Camp Williams Road in Bluffdale. If you have any questions please call either (801) 326-2372 or 1-800-894-9497

For more information about  
obtaining an ad contact the  
Utah Division of Veterans  
affairs.  
**1-800-894-9497**





# VA’s Headstones and Markers

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) furnishes upon request, at no charge to the applicant, a headstone or marker for the grave of an eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world. For deaths that occurred before Sept. 11, 2001, VA may furnish a headstone or marker only for graves that are not marked with a private headstone.

Headstones and markers are provided for eligible spouses and dependents of veterans only in national, military post or state veterans cemeteries. Spouses and dependents buried in private cemeteries are not eligible for a government headstone or marker.

Flat bronze, granite or marble markers and upright granite and marble headstones are available. The style chosen must be consistent with the cemetery’s rules. VA national cemeteries order the style used in their cemeteries. Most VA national cemeteries use upright granite or marble headstones, which measure 42 inches in height and 13 inches in width. Niche markers are also available to mark columbaria used for inurnment of cremated remains.

Eligibility :

Any deceased veteran discharged from the U.S. armed forces under conditions other than dishonorable is eligible to receive a government headstone or marker. For enlisted persons whose service began after Sept. 7, 1980, and for officers whose service began after Oct. 17, 1981, service must have been for at least 24 months, or the period for which the person was called to active duty.

Members of the reserves and National Guard who die on active duty or while performing training duty may receive a headstone or marker. Reservists and National Guardsmen with 20 years service who are entitled to retired pay are also eligible. A copy of the Reserve Retirement Eligibility Benefits Letter must accompany the application. People who had only active duty for training while in the National Guard or reserves are not eligible unless there are special circumstances, such as death while on duty or as a result of training.

If the death occurred before Sept. 11, 2001, by law VA may only furnish a headstone or marker if the grave is unmarked.

The same eligibility criteria apply for burial in VA’s national cemeteries.

How To Order a Government Headstone or Marker :

When burial or memorialization is in a national, military post, or state veterans cemetery, cemetery staff will order a headstone or marker, using inscription information provided by the next of kin.

# VA Warns of Telephone Prescription Scam

WASHINGTON - The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is warning veterans not to give credit card numbers over the phone to callers claiming to update VA prescription information.

“Some unscrupulous scammers have targeted America’s veterans, especially our older veterans,” said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “VA does not call veterans and ask them to disclose personal financial information over the phone.”

The latest scam, currently centered in the Midwest, comes from callers who identify themselves as working for the “Patient Care Group.” They say VA recently changed procedures for dispensing prescriptions and ask for the veteran’s credit card number.

“VA has not changed its processes for dispensing prescription medicines,” Nicholson said. “And we’ve definitely not changed our long-standing commitment to protect the personal information of our veterans.”

Veterans with questions about VA services should contact the nearest VA medical center or call, toll-free, 1-877-222-8387.

# Utah and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

• **General:** The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers a wide variety of programs and services for the nation’s 26 million veterans. In 2003, more than 4.8 million people were treated in VA health-care facilities, 3.4 million veterans and survivors received VA disability compensation or pensions, 473,000 used GI Bill education benefits and nearly 2.7 million owned homes purchased with GI Bill home loan benefits. About 90,000 veterans and family members were buried in VA’s national cemeteries and nearly 345,000 headstones and markers were provided for veterans’ graves worldwide.

VA spent more than \$330 million in Utah in 2003 to serve about 161,000 veterans who live in the state. Last year, 26,806 people received health care and 16,978 veterans and survivors received disability compensation or pension payments from VA in Utah. More than 3,998 veterans, reservists or survivors used GI Bill payments for their education and 17,204 owned homes with active VA home loan guarantees.

• **Health Care:** One of the most visible of all VA benefits is health care. VA has 158 hospitals, 858 ambulatory care and community-based outpatient clinics, 206 Vet Centers, 133 nursing homes, 42 residential rehabilitation treatment programs and 92 comprehensive home care programs. Due to technology and national and VA health care trends, VA has changed from a hospital-based system to a primarily outpatient-focused system over the past eight years.

In Utah, VA operates a major medical center in Salt Lake City, which serves veterans in one of the largest geographic areas in the VA system. It is a modern, 121-bed facility specializing in cardiology, oncology and amputee care. In fiscal year 2003, VA treated 5,423 inpatients and completed 334,522 outpatient visits in Utah. Veterans are referred to Salt Lake City from throughout Utah, Nevada, Colorado, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming for specialty care. Special outpatient services include clinics for post-traumatic stress disorder, domestic violence, same-day surgery, women veterans and ambulatory medicine. Veterans receiving outpatient care, who are able to function independently, are welcome to stay in the 30-bed “hoptel” and recreational vehicle lot.

The VA Salt Lake City Health Care System provides primary and mental health care in four community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) in Ogden, Orem, St. George and Roosevelt. Veterans are also treated by contract arrangement in Nephi and Fountain Green, Utah; Ely, Nev.; Pocatello, Idaho; and Green River, Wyo. Vet Centers are located in Provo and Salt Lake City.

The Salt Lake City medical center is a major training site for the University of Utah School of Medicine and affiliates with training programs in nearly all health sciences.

For more information on VA Benefits please visit [www.ut.ngb.army.mil/veterans](http://www.ut.ngb.army.mil/veterans) the official website of the Utah Division of Veterans Affairs.

# American Legion Boys State



From Left to Right Darrel “Sarge” Loveland and William Christoffersen both volunteers for Boys State

Utah has been fortunate to have some dedicated people who have contributed much of their lives to a cause. The American Legion Boys State is one of those programs that have many who are committed to the idea of educating young men on governmental issues. Two Legion members have given this program more than a combined 100 years.

Darrel “Sarge” Loveland began volunteering at Boys State in 1955. He started as a counselor and has held every position including President. Sarge’s work at Utah Boys State was complimented by volunteering at Boys Nation in 1975 and every year after for 21 years. Sarge recalls his best year is right now, because he is still alive and has enjoyed every year.

William Christoffersen first became involved in Utah Boys state in 1956 when it was held at Camp Williams. Bill recalls that in 1959 Boys State move to Utah State in Logan. Now it is held at Weber State in Ogden. The highest number of boys that attended in one year is about 610. Bill says that when Boys State was held at Camp Williams, it was more athletic, now with the school required subjects, the emphases is on education. In fact in the past two years there has been more than \$500,000 awarded in scholarships to the attendees. The Samsung Scholarship has been awarded to eight Utah Boys and Girl Staters in the last nine year.

One thing that can be said about Boys State, it must get in the blood. Both Sarge and Bill say that they will continue to participate in the Utah Boys State for many more years. Many others have committed a week in June to help out and come back year after year. Our thanks to Darrel Loveland and Bill Christoffersen for their devotion to this program.



# National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators

## 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference



Guest speaker, Her Royal Highness, Brigadier General Aisha Bint Al Hussein, Princess of Jordan.

The National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators met in Corpus Christi, Texas from June 9-12, 2005. I was honored to represent Utah as your State Women Veterans Coordinator at this 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference. The conference was informative, with workshops and presentations on a wide range of women veterans issues. One highlight was hearing from Her Royal Highness, Brigadier General Aisha Bint Al Hussein, Princess of Jordan. Her Military training and career are filled with pioneering efforts; such as being the first woman in the Middle East to complete five military parachute jumps and receive her wings. Brigadier General Aisha spoke about her role as Direcotr of the Directorate of Women’s Affairs in the Jordanian Armed Forces. It is interesting to note that she received most of her formal education in the United States. Other powerful speakers at ths conference were: Linda Piquet, Women Veterans Outreach Program Manager U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington DC; Irene Trowell-Harris, Director, Center for Women Veterans, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington DC; Ruby L. Miller, Deputy Director, Center for Minority Veterans, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington DC; and Carole L. Turner, RN, MN, Director, Women Veterans Health Program, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington DC.

Brigadier General Larita Aragon, Commander, Oklahoma Air National Guard was the speaker at an evening social. She told us of her experience in meeting with some high ranking Russian dignitaries at Harvard University. The Russians didn’t believe she was a real General as she was the only female in the room. Briagadier General (Retired) Wilma Vaught, founder of Women in Military Service for America (WIMSA) lead the Memorial in honor of those women who have died in Iraq the past year.

At the conference, my counterparts in other states shared ideas for reaching out to, assisting and honoring women veterans. Most states host a statewide event honoring women veterans. The Salt Lake City George E. Wahlen Medical Center will host “A Salute to Women Veterans” on November 7, 2005 in the Multi-Purpose Center, Building #8 at 11:30 a.m. Sandi Folkerts, Women Veterans Coordinator, VA Regional Office, will be our guest speaker. I encourage you to attend this activity that will honor the State’s Women Veterans.

By: Veda Jones  
Utah State Women Veterans Coordinator

### Important Telephones Numbers

Utah State Division of Veterans Affairs	(801) 326-2372
Toll Free Outside Salt Lake City	1-800-894-9497
Utah Veterans Cemetery	(801) 254-9036
Utah Veterans Nursing Home	(801) 584-1900
SLC VA Regional Office	1-800-827-1000
George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center	1-800-613-4012
VA Home Loans	1-888-487-1970
Montgomery GI Bill	1-888-422-4551
SLC Vet Center	1-800-281-1294
Provo Vet Center	1-800-246-1197
Veterans Upward Bound	(801) 626-7173
Homeless Veterans Fellowship Ogden	(801) 392-7662
Disable American Veterans	(801) 326-2375
American Legion	(801) 326-2380
Veterans of Foreign Wars	(801) 326-2385

# VA Secretary Announces “Fulfilling the Commitment” Initiative

WASHINGTON – The Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced a new initiative called *Fulfilling the Commitment – Coming Home to Work* today at a three-day conference put on by VA to help veterans make the transition from military service to civilian life.

“All Americans can be grateful for the service and sacrifice of the men and women of our armed forces,” said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “The VA is committed to assisting these young heroes in the transition from military life to the civilian work force through a wide-ranging array of programs.”

“It just makes good common sense to hire these highly trained, disciplined young people, who volunteered, served and are now honorably discharged,” he added.

*Fulfilling the Commitment – Coming Home to Work* is an umbrella initiative, a comprehensive intergovernmental and public-private alliance that will ensure separating Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans that they will have employment opportunities when they return home from the war on terrorism.

This initiative focuses on linking OIF/OEF service members to existing resources through local and regional job markets, regardless of where they separate, where they return, or the career or education they pursue.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in the first three quarters of 2005, almost 15 percent of veterans in the 20-24 year-old age group were unemployed, nearly three times the national rate.

“The young men and women who protect our way of life need to know that they will have the opportunity to work and to take care of their families once they are discharged from military service,” said Nicholson.

Some 200,000 service members separate from active military service annually. This initiative will combine the efforts of federal, state and private sector entities to address their employment needs.

“This conference represents an important crossroads in our nation’s history,” said R. Allen Pittman, VA’s Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration. “The collective efforts of everyone at this conference will help us ensure that unemployment and under-employment are not barriers to the successful transition of service members from the battlefield back to mainstream America.”

VA is the nation’s second-largest Cabinet department and one of the nation’s largest employers of disabled veterans, with about 20,000 disabled employees among its work force of more than 237,000.

People wishing to receive e-mail from VA with the latest news releases and updated fact sheets can subscribe at the following Internet address: [http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/opalist\\_listserv.cfm](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/opalist_listserv.cfm)

# VA and Goodwill Sign Training and Employment Pact

WASHINGTON – In participation with President Bush’s Faith-Based and Community Initiative Program, officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Goodwill Industries International Inc. recently signed an agreement that will increase opportunities for vocational training and employment-related assistance for service-connected disabled veterans.

“Both VA and Goodwill are committed to providing these brave men and women with opportunities to seek career advancement, job mobility, greater financial security, and economic well-being for their families,” said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The agreement builds on the achievements of VA’s Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program, which assists veterans with service-connected disabilities prepare for, find, and keep suitable employment.

With locations in the United States, Canada and 22 other countries, Goodwill Industries International, Inc. provides a network of 206 community-based organizations that serve people with workplace disadvantages and disabilities by providing job training and employment services, as well as job placement and post-employment support.

For more information about the agreement and this program, go to <http://www.vetsuccess.gov/> or <http://www.goodwill.org>. Information on VA’s Faith Based Community Initiative Program can be found at [www.va.gov/opa/fbci](http://www.va.gov/opa/fbci).



# POW/MIA Recognition Event at the University of Utah

The Salt Lake City VA POW Advisory Committee, University of Utah AFROTC Detachment 850, and the Air Force Association co-hosted a POW/MIA Recognition Event at the Student Union building on the campus at the University of Utah on September 28, 2005. Former POW and Committee member, Jay Hess, one of five special guests at the activity, was the featured speaker and spoke to an audience of approximately 50 students, guests, military members, and staff from the Utah congressional delegations. He related several poignant personal stories of his captivity and life as a POW in Vietnam. All five of the POWs who attended brought various memorabilia for display. In the afternoon, a flag ceremony was held at the University's President's Circle featuring elements from the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps ROTC detachments, as well as an honor guard from Hill AFB. More than 100 people watched and listened as the honor guard played taps and fired a 21-gun salute. This event also included participation from Junior ROTC cadets from Highland High School (Air Force) and East High School (Army) in Salt Lake City

## POW Recognition Luncheon

The Salt Lake City VA POW Advisory Committee will again sponsor the annual POW Recognition Luncheon on Friday, April 7, 2006, beginning at 11:30 AM, at the Salt Lake Airport Hilton Hotel. The Luncheon and program will recognize and honor our former POWs living in the area. Invitations to the event will be mailed in March 2006. For more details and information on this or other POW issues, please contact our Committee Chairman, Tom Aikins at 582-1565, extension 2336.

## Compensation

• continued from pg 6

• Where a veteran has more than one disability, the percentages are not simply added together to produce a new rating. Instead, a formula described in federal regulations calculates the overall rating.

• Among veterans on the rolls, the largest category of service-connected disabilities is musculoskeletal problems, accounting for about 40 percent of all disabilities. This includes such problems as impairment of the knee and arthritis due to trauma. Data on the number and type of disabilities are published annually (<http://www.vba.va.gov/reports.htm>).

## Annual Cost-of-Living Adjustments

A proposed cost-of-living increase is included in the President's budget proposal released early each calendar year. It is part of the spending forecast and appropriations request for the ensuing fiscal year, a starting point for legislative discussion. However, the actual percentage increase is set through a separate bill debated by Congress and usually signed into law the following fall.

Legislators are not bound by any specific annual Consumer Price Index formula, but historically have chosen to mirror the percentage given to Social Security recipients. The Social Security increase, in turn, is based on a Bureau of Labor Statistics calculation of the rise in the consumer price index for urban wage earners and clerical workers (CPI-W).

Cost of living adjustments become effective December 1 each year and are reflected in the payment received by veterans on or about the first day of the new year. Whenever a payment falls on a holiday or weekend, as is the case with the January 1 payment each year, that month's payment is issued the last prior business day.

# “SALTY DOGS” A BIG HIT AT NATIONAL VETERANS CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL

Nine Utah veterans, all members of the “Salty Dogs” musical group, performed at the 2005 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Denver, Colo., October 17-23. At the event, they joined nearly 100 other veterans from across the country who were selected to participate in the annual program.

### Local group members include:

Barton Allan, 72, an Army veteran from Draper;  
Paul Boruff, 54, a Navy veteran from Salt Lake City;  
Lewis Garret, 71, an Air Force veteran from Highland;  
James Lee, 45, an Air Force veteran from North Salt Lake;  
Tom Hollingsworth, an Air force and Army veteran from West Jordan;  
John Prather, 61, a Marine Corps veteran from Draper;  
Ray Ross, 57, an Army veteran from Midvale;  
Raymond H. Ross, 82, an Army veteran from West Valley; and  
George Simmons, 66, a Navy veteran from Draper.

During the annual stage performance on October 23 at the Newman Center for the Performing Arts, the group performed “Man of La Mancha.” Several members also had solos in the 2005 Veterans Ensemble chorus. Group member George Simmons said, “The Salty Dogs’ hard work has paid off. The American dream can come true. I really can make a difference in a peaceful way in this world. If we can make someone smile or feel good each day, then that day is well spent. Participating in the Festival has made me feel more worthwhile and a little more confident.”

The Festival showcases the talents of America’s veterans who have participated in year-long talent competitions in music, drama, dance and art. The competition is open to all veterans receiving care at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities.

There were more than 2,700 participants nationwide vying for an invitation to this year’s Festival from 101 VA facilities. Invitations to participate were sent to 130 veterans who are medal winners in national music, dance, drama or art contests. The Salty Dogs won first place in three categories of the national music competition: vocal group (Broadway); vocal group (religious); and a tie in vocal group (country/folk/bluegrass).

Other Utah veterans attending the 2005 Festival include Army veteran Don Gibby, 63, from Ogden, who won “Best of Show” in the artwork competition for his pottery entitled “Native Cutthroat Trout and Salmon.” Nina Mincarelli, 59, a Navy veteran from Salt Lake City, won first place in the national drama competition in the solo (interpretive performance) dramatic category; and high honors in the national music competition in the vocal solo (religious) category. Mincarelli performed as part of the chorus in the stage show production.

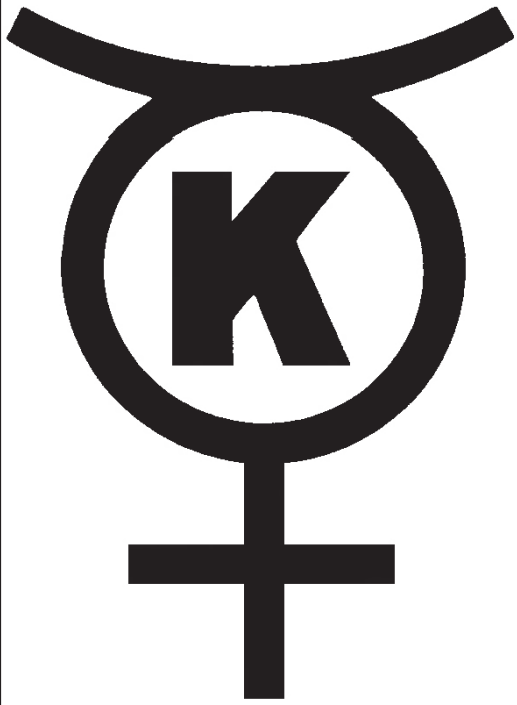
VA medical facilities incorporate creative arts into their recreation therapy programs. Many of the veterans who participate are facing significant physical or emotional challenges. This annual competition recognizes the progress and recovery made through creative art therapy, and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation’s veterans after disease, disability or life crisis. The program demonstrates how creative expression helps facilitate successful treatment for a variety of health problems.

The Festival is presented by VA, the American Legion Auxiliary and Help Hospitalized Veterans. It was hosted this year by the VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System in Denver.

For more information about the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, please contact Kim Byers, public affairs coordinator, at (734) 761-7824; or log on to the Festival’s web site: [www.creativeartsfestival.org](http://www.creativeartsfestival.org). Individual news releases and photos of all participating veterans are available on the web site under “Participant Information.”

## VA Benefits for Surviving Spouses

<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/dependents/Spouse.htm>



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